

*This material is strictly for non-commercial purposes only. It may be used for such a purpose provided it is reproduced without alteration or omission, and that a link is provided to the website [www.tasannuf.org](http://www.tasannuf.org). All other uses require the explicit written permission of the publisher.*

## **Arrogance and Humility By Shaykh Zulfiqar Ahmed**

### The Seat of Love and Knowledge

Allah ﷻ created Hadrat Adam ﷺ from clay, the angels from pure light (*nur*), and Shaitan and the jinn from fire. The Holy Quran states that Shaitan was from among the jinn, and he disobeyed Allah ﷻ. His original name was Azazeel, and he earned the title *Ta'us ul-Mala'ika* because of his consistency in the worship and obedience of Allah ﷻ. He was not the leader of the angels, as is how many misinterpret the meaning of *ta'us*. *Ta'us* means peacock, which is a most handsome creature from among Allah's feathered creation. Shaitan hence stood out from among the angels (*mala'ika*) like a beautiful peacock among ordinary birds because of his exemplary worship.

Allah ﷻ had created the jinn prior to creating mankind, and the jinn had a history of spreading corruption and bloodshed in the earth. Hence, when Allah ﷻ communicated His intention of creating Hadrat Adam ﷺ to the angels, we learn from hadith that the reply of the angels reflected their knowledge of this tainted history of the jinn. The angels asked Allah ﷻ why He wanted to create another species that would cause havoc and bloodshed throughout the earth, when the angels were already there to praise Him.

Allah ﷻ asked Azazeel his opinion, and the latter closely examined the yet lifeless body of Hadrat Adam ﷺ before him. After studying the outside of this figure he requested permission to examine it from the inside, and Allah ﷻ allowed him to do so. He then entered the body and studied every single part in detail, but there was one organ he could not enter, and he asked Allah ﷻ about this when he came out. Allah ﷻ said, "That is the heart of Adam and the seat of my love (*muhabbah*)."

The heart is the seat and central receptor for the grandeur (*tajalliyyaat*) of Allah ﷻ. Allah ﷻ says that the Holy Quran was revealed onto the heart of the Messenger ﷺ of Allah. Subsequently, all revelation (*wahi*) and inspiration (*ilham*) descends upon the heart.

### The Transmission of *Wahi*

Modern science has revealed that the human heart has a transmitter that sends and receives signals, something that the Messenger ﷺ of Allah told the community of believers more than fourteen hundred years ago. It functions as a receiver in that the heart of the Messenger ﷺ of Allah would receive *wahi* and *ilham* from Allah ﷻ. This was not in words, but we know from the Messenger ﷺ of Allah himself that he would hear something resembling the distant toll of a bell when the *wahi* would descend upon his noble heart.

The scholars of hadith (*muhaditheen*) have deduced two crucial points from this statement of the Messenger ﷺ of Allah. The first point is that the Prophet ﷺ was specific in his analogy of a *distant* bell. Since the precise source of a distant sound cannot be located, the scholars drew the conclusion that the Messenger ﷺ of Allah intended to convey that *wahi* and *ilham* are multi, and not unidirectional.

The second noteworthy point is that a bell toll is produced by a periodic motion, traveling on a wavelength at a certain frequency. All messages travel at a certain frequency that can only be received by a particular piece of electronic equipment such as a radio or a television. These concepts are very easy to understand in today's technological age, but the Messenger ﷺ of Allah introduced it more than fourteen hundred years ago to a nomadic culture that could not even imagine it. Thus the divine messages received by the Prophet ﷺ were not only multidirectional but also signals of a specific wavelength traveling on a specific frequency.

#### Tuning In

The human ear cannot decipher these electronic waves, but a radio has this ability if tuned to the right frequency band. Reception would however suddenly fade into static if the radio's tuning needle is moved from the band on which the signals were being deciphered perfectly, although the transmitting station, message and receiver remain the same. The only variable in this scenario is the wavelength - the receiver stops receiving because the sender is transmitting at a specific frequency that the receiver is now not listening for since the tuner has been moved. The transmitter and receiver must be aligned to the same wavelength and frequency to be able to communicate messages. The slightest misalignment means that the message will not be received.

The prophets could communicate with Allah ﷻ because their hearts were perfectly tuned to the frequency of *wahi*, and this is the exact reason why the Friends of Allah ﷻ (*auliyaa*) receive *ilham* and can communicate in the same way. The hearts of such people are pure enough to be perfectly in tune to the transmitter in the heavens.

#### Differences between *Wahi* and *Ilham*

*Wahi* is always correct whereas there is room for error in *ilham* because it involves insight into specifics. A fundamental difference is that *wahi* descends upon the prophets whereas *ilham* comes to the *auliyaa*. A second point is that it becomes mandatory to make *wahi* public to the people, because it is the Word of Allah ﷻ. *Ilham* does not need to be made public. Allah ﷻ told His Messenger ﷺ in the Holy Quran that he would be protected but he would have to transmit the Message of Islam that was sent to him.

Perhaps the weakest structure in creation is a spider's web. However, such a web proved to be stronger than a wall in guarding the Messenger ﷺ of Allah in the Cave of *Thaur* from the Quraish who were in hot pursuit as the Prophet migrated from Makkah to Madinah. Allah ﷻ fulfilled His promise of protection countless times because the Messenger ﷺ of Allah would not be restrained from proclaiming the *wahi* that he was inspired with. This is a beautiful yet simple illustration of the reality that all of man's weapons are rendered useless against the power of Allah ﷻ.

#### An Enlightening Illustration

Hadrat Qasim Nanotvi's (May the mercy of Allah ﷻ be upon him) home was equipped with a large overhead fan for cooling the house. It was attached to the roof and operated with ropes. One hot summer day, Hadrat Nanotvi was seated in a gathering while his attendant was operating the fan. This attendant was aware of the teachings of our elders, which tell us that the whole gathering benefits from the company of a righteous man, and asked Hadrat Nanotvi, "I do not understand how so many people end up benefiting from one righteous man. Surely only he is pious so why are others getting credit just by sitting in his company?"

Hadrat Nanotvi told him to stop the fan and asked, "Who were you operating the fan for?" The man replied, "For you, Hadrat." Hadrat Nanotvi then asked the people in the gathering, "Were you feeling the coolness from the fan also?" and the people replied that they were. Hadrat continued, "This man was working the fan for me, but all of you sitting close were feeling the breeze. In the same way Allah's ﷻ blessings are focused on His special and noble *auliyaa* but the people who remain in their company also benefit." Hence a person will benefit even if he sits quietly. We learn from the saying of the Prophet ﷺ that the person who sits in the company of the *auliyaa* will not go astray.

This attendant was very inquisitive and once posed another question. He said, "Both prophets and *auliyaa* have *kashf*, but the *kashf* of prophets is always right and that of *auliyaa* can be wrong at times. What is the reasoning behind this difference?"

At that time Hadrat Nanotvi was leaving for a meeting; he heard the question but continued to walk. He stopped when the building to which he was headed was in view and turned to his attendant and said "How many steps away from us do you think that building is?" he asked. His attendant thought and said, "Hadrat, it must be two hundred steps."

Both of them started walking and the distance actually turned out to be approximately four hundred steps. Hadrat stopped approximately five steps from the building they were proceeding towards and repeated his questions. His attendant replied confidently, "Hadrat, it must be five steps," and indeed, that is what the distance turned out to be. Hadrat then turned to his attendant and said, "*Kashf* works the same way. When we were far you failed to estimate the distance accurately, and when we got close you identified it exactly. Allah ﷻ shows both prophets and *auliyaa* things and events the same way; the only difference is that prophets are shown them from such a close distance that they can accurately predict events, just like you accurately predicted the distance when we were close. *Auliyaa* are shown the exact same thing but from far away so that sometimes their predictions may be correct and at other times they may make a mistake."

#### Arrogance, Humility, and the Avoidance of Argumentation

Allah ﷻ ordered the angels to bow down to Hadrat Adam ﷺ, and all the angels bowed except Azazeel. Allah ﷻ demanded to know why he had not submitted, and Azazeel presented the first ever argument in creation by arrogantly claiming that he was superior to Hadrat Adam ﷺ. The Holy Quran narrates that Shaitan presented as proof of his superiority

---

<sup>1</sup> Knowledge of the unseen

the fact that Allah ﷻ had created him from fire while Hadrat Adam ؑ was created from clay. Shaitan became an unbeliever by disobeying Allah ﷻ.

Islam prohibits arguments for this very reason. We know from hadith that the Messenger ﷺ of Allah said he would promise Paradise to the one who would refrain from arguing even though he may be right. Arguments resolve nothing because people merely become defensive and try to prove each other wrong, rather than reasonably discussing the issue. When being provoked one must remember that the situation could get out of control if not nipped in the bud and allowed to escalate. The instigating party will eventually calm down and apologize, and the flaring of tempers will resolve nothing. The Prophet ﷺ said that Allah ﷻ would give the reward that Hadrat Ayyub's ؑ received for his patience to the husband or wife who restrains his or her anger at provocation by the other spouse.

Hence Muslims have been advised to refrain from arguments; they are most unproductive because a person becomes blinded by his ego (*nafs*). The arguments of scholars are on a different plane and the subject of reward because they seek to resolve important and necessary matters for the Muslims by way of discussing the Holy Quran and Sunnah.

Shaitan presented the intellectual argument for not bowing down to Hadrat Adam ؑ that he was superior to the latter since Adam had been created from clay that stays on the ground and he had been created from fire that rises towards the sky. Allah ﷻ created angels from light and jinn from fire, so a valid scholarly question arises as to why Allah ﷻ appointed Hadrat Adam ؑ, who was indeed created from clay, as His vice regent on the earth, and hence established his superiority over all creation?

Scholars provide a simple answer to this in their writings. Clay or soil remains attached to the ground, and hence displays an unassuming and humble nature. On the other hand, fire reaches upwards as Shaitan pointed out and so is identified with the characteristic of pride and arrogance. Allah ﷻ is pleased with the former and dislikes the latter, and so Allah ﷻ will continue to bestow honor upon those who humble themselves before Him ﷻ. Clay is the material from which man is created, so it is most appropriate for him to keep his feet firmly on the ground and remain humble; he will indeed be disgraced and brought back where he belongs whenever he tries to overstep his boundaries.

Allah ﷻ loves humility and dislikes arrogance. It is well known in our tradition that Paradise will be denied to those who have the slightest amount of arrogance in their hearts. It follows that Shaitan was exiled from Paradise because of his arrogance in claiming himself to be superior to another of Allah's ﷻ creation.

The Messenger ﷺ of Allah was the supreme example for all mankind, and consequently he provided the best model for us in humility. At mealtimes, it is narrated that the Prophet ﷺ used to sit and eat as a slave sits in front of his master, and it is further written that he used to walk with his head bowed very low, without the slightest airs about him.

#### An Outstanding Example of Humility

History has never witnessed a more peaceful and more unassuming conquest than that of the Prophet's ﷺ conquest of Makkah. Although he was entering Makkah as an unopposed

conqueror, the head of the Prophet ﷺ was bowed so low in humility and gratitude to Allah ﷻ that it was touching his camel's neck.

Hadrat Maulana Yahya (May the mercy of Allah ﷻ be upon him) was a renowned scholar from our past, highly respected for his knowledge and as a memorizer of the Holy Quran (*hafiz*). He was very pious and thousands would be attracted to his gatherings in order to learn from him. His son, Hadrat Muhammad Zakariya (May the mercy of Allah ﷻ be upon him) also became a very well respected scholar of hadith and thousands of others trained under him. Hadrat Zakariya wrote a biography entitled *Yaade Ayyam*, in which he included some excerpts about his father.

A rich but pious man lived next to the Islamic seminary (*madrasah*) attended by Maulana Yahya, and would donate not only his wealth but also his time in the service of the *madrasah*. He was very devoted and was in search for a husband for his daughter. The daughter was beautiful beyond description and hence there was no shortage of proposals. However, the pious father wanted a righteous son-in-law and so approached Maulana Yahya's father. When asked for his approval Maulana Yahya politely refused and so the lady was later married to one of her relatives.

Years passed and Maulana Yahya got married and Maulana Zakariya was born. They still had good relations with their wealthy neighbors and would often be invited to dinner parties at their house. Maulana Yahya would sit in the men's section but Maulana Zakariya was only nine at the time so would run about all over the house. He would often see the lady of the house sitting and chewing *paan*<sup>2</sup> that her husband would carefully prepare and hand to her.

At one such gathering the lady of the house sent a message to Maulana Yahya that she firmly intended to make Zakariya her son-in-law since she herself had been refused by Maulana Yahya. Zakariya refused when asked, but at the time this was jovially ignored because he was so young. However, upon reaching home Maulana Yahya asked his son why he had refused. Maulana Zakariya answered bluntly and honestly as would any child, "I don't want to run after my wife all day preparing *paan* for her." The son realized that the mother was so spoiled that the husband was catering submissively to her whims, and the daughter would naturally take after the mother.

Maulana Yahya remained quiet for a while and then said, "I had also refused her mother's proposal but for an entirely different reason." His son was surprised and asked what that was. Maulana Yahya replied, "When my father came to me with her proposal, I said to him that I could not marry in that household because I would not again be able to have the pleasure of sleeping on a hard floor."

Father and son both refused marriage proposals from the same house, but the son's reasoning had pride in it while the father's response had reflected his deep humility. Arrogance leads away from Allah ﷻ whereas humility leads one closer to Him ﷻ because He likes for His servants to lower themselves. Human beings are slaves to their *nafs* because of this arrogance, and this *nafs* can only be trained by submission to Allah ﷻ and humility in front of Him and His creation.

---

<sup>2</sup> A South-Asian mouth freshener made by wrapping beetle nut, fennel seeds, and other ingredients in a special leaf

#### Recognizing the Importance of Humility

Hadrat Umar رضي الله عنه used to beg Allah ﷻ to be elevated in the eyes of others but to become humble in his opinion of himself. People only occupy a lofty position in the hearts of those around them if they are deeply respected, and the arrogant rarely inspire such sincere reverence. Allah ﷻ will honor people and elevate them in creation only if they are sincere in their humility, and their actions reflect this quality. The branches with the sweetest and most valuable fruit are the ones hanging closest to the ground; attaining humility is the means by which man is deemed worthy in front of Allah ﷻ.

Humility is a gift from Allah ﷻ that is to be sought and begged for, just as we implore Allah ﷻ for such blessings as houses or wives. Man is deprived of a great blessing if he is deprived of humbleness. Our *nafs* tries its best to instill arrogance in us, which ultimately leads to our destruction. Our best weapon against our *nafs* is to remind ourselves of our origins.

The Holy Quran says that the servants of The Most Merciful should walk with humility upon the earth. Hence we should ask Allah ﷻ to inculcate this humility deep in our hearts and allow it to be reflected in all our actions, and we should inculcate the same in our children.

Allah ﷻ created clay to be intrinsically humble, and created man from that clay so man would also be humble because He loves humility. Man needs to purge his heart of pride and arrogance and acquire a humble posture before he faces Allah ﷻ on the Day of Judgment. May Allah ﷻ help us all in training our *nafs* so that we become humble and root out arrogance from our character.

*The kettle only fills the cup when its spout is lowered*

*A shaykh can only benefit others when he lowers himself before Allah ﷻ.*

*This material is strictly for non-commercial purposes only. It may be used for such a purpose provided it is reproduced without alteration or omission, and that a link is provided to the website [www.tasawwuf.org](http://www.tasawwuf.org). All other uses require the explicit written permission of the publisher.*